LBJ, JFK Exceeded Powers Of Presidency, Historian Says

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Historian Henry Steele Commager charged yesterday that Presidents Johnson and Kennedy exceeded their powers by mounting "major military interventions" in Vietnam, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Commager, writing in the New Republic magazine, said: "Four times in the past seven years, Presidents have mounted major military interventions without Congressional authority on the plea of emergency."

He said that of the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban missile crisis, the revolution in the Dominican Republic, and the Vietnam war, "only one of these—the missile crisis—could claim to be a genuine emergency."

"If the Bay of Pigs situation and the Santo Domingo election dispute represented emergencies so imperative that there was no time to consult Congress, then anything whatsoever can be twisted into an emergency and the traditional requirement of consultation with the Congress is a thing of the past," Commager said.

"In the long run, the abuse of the Executive power cannot be separated from the abuse of national power. If we subvert world order and destroy world peace, we must inevitably subvert and destroy our own political institutions first. This we are now in the process of doing."